

Highland Community News

Thursday, May 17, 2007

National fight against poverty begins

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In preparation for a national conference on poverty prevention throughout the United States, the San Bernardino chapter of Community Action Partnership hosted a special symposium on poverty and economic security last Thursday at San Bernardino Valley College.

Community Action Partnership was established in 1971 as the National Association of Community Action Agencies. It is the national organization representing the interests of 1,000 community action agencies working to fight poverty at the local level.

Several local experts including elected officials and community organization leaders spoke at the forum, commenting on five critical issues and

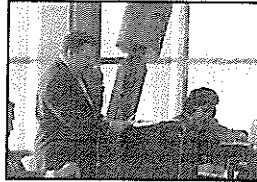
their relation to poverty.

Education, employment, health, housing and crime prevention — good standing in these fields will likely produce communities with little poverty, said Assistant to the Director of Community Action Partnership Rowena Concepcion.

"In San Bernardino county 285,000 people live at or below the poverty line, that's 15 percent of the county's total population," she said.

Poverty can stem from a number of issues, but poor health, little or no education, high crime rates, low income and poor housing are the main culprits.

Housing is a big issue in California, ranked 49th of all 50 states in home ownership. In San Bernardino county many spend about half of their



HIGHLAND COMMUNITY NEWS PHOTO BY MICHAEL SORBA

San Bernardino County Housing Director Daniel Nackerman speaks about better housing for San Bernardino County residents during last Thursday's Symposium on Poverty and Economic Security at San Bernardino Valley College.

monthly income on rent, said San Bernardino County Housing Director Daniel Nackerman.

Concepcion said the county needs to move away from multifamily developments like apartment complexes and team

with private developers to create more affordable, single family housing.

Education and developing skills is important to obtain good paying jobs, she said. For those who may not be able to afford an education on their own, a number of projects exist to help. To encourage local youth to attend school, the city of Montclair has a program that pays for a student's books and tuition at the community college level.

After a year and a half out of high school a young person can be making \$30 an hour as a radiation technician, said Dr. Juan Carlos Belliard, Associate Professor of Global Health at Loma Linda University. He added that more high school students need to be informed of vocational programs like this.

The programs exist and there are solutions to many of the ills that lead to poverty. The problem is communication and partnership, said San Bernardino

County Fifth District Supervisor Josie Gonzalez. Many non-profit agencies are against sharing resources and working together because of fear they'll lose the people they're treating and thus lose funding sources as well, she said.

Across the nation 1,100 other community action groups are hosting similar forums on poverty and economic security. They are intended to gather information from local communities on what causes poverty and what best practices can be utilized to combat it.

The information gathered from these local meetings will be shared at a national poverty forum May 28 through 31 in Bethesda, Maryland. A list of recommendations on how to best combat poverty nationally will be drafted after the four day symposium. The list will then be forwarded to the White House in either 2008 or 2009 as part of a strategy to fight poverty nationwide.